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RUEHSL/AMEMBASSY BRATISLAVA PRIORITY 0131  
RUEHUP/AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST PRIORITY 0050  
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 0971  
RUEHHE/AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PRIORITY 1486  
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ PRIORITY 1193  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 1824  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0730  
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO PRIORITY 0529  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 2691  
RUEHPG/AMEMBASSY PRAGUE PRIORITY 1025  
RUEHSJ/AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE PRIORITY 0284  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0650  
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MADRID 001960

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WHA FOR PDAS SHAPIRO AND WHA/CCA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/01/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [CU](#) [SP](#)

SUBJECT: SPAIN ON CASTRO SUCCESSION

REF: A. STATE 125684

[1](#)B. MADRID 1923

[1](#)C. MADRID 1834

Classified By: Ambassador Eduardo Aguirre; reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Responding to REF A points on the situation in Cuba, MFA Director General Javier Sandomingo told the Ambassador that Spain believes Fidel Castro is suffering from a serious illness and may not resume full control over the Cuban state. Sandomingo cautioned, however, that significant change in Cuba would be unlikely until it was clear that Fidel would not be returning. He said that Spain would be "as discreet as possible" with respect to the current situation in Havana and reported that the Spanish Embassy in Havana had been in contact with dissidents to urge calm and offer protection should the need arise. In the event of a permanent transfer of power in Havana, the Ambassador urged Spain to commit to consult with the USG before recognizing the post-Fidel leadership; Sandomingo agreed in principle and said he would relay the Ambassador's message to Deputy FM Leon (currently on travel in Latin America). Sandomingo said Spain was eager to engage the USG on this issue and hoped to arrange substantive discussions with WHA A/S Shannon on the margins of the Uribe inauguration in Bogota. The Ambassador had discussed the Cuba succession issue with FM Moratinos last week (REF B), with Moratinos emphasizing that Spain desired stability in post-Fidel Cuba, but would not endorse any particular leader, including Raul Castro, as a "legitimate" successor to Fidel. Neither Moratinos nor Sandomingo went as far as agreeing to withhold recognition/support for a Raul Castro-led Cuban Government. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) The Ambassador met with DG Sandomingo on August 2 to deliver REF A points (NOTE: FM Moratinos was in Lebanon and Deputy FM Leon is on travel in Latin America, making

Sandomingo the highest-ranking MFA official available to discuss this issue). The Ambassador noted the USG's satisfaction with our closer bilateral collaboration on Cuba and requested Spain's insights regarding Fidel Castro's status. Sandomingo, who served as Spain's DCM in Havana in the mid 1990s, said that Spanish officials were convinced that Fidel Castro was in fact suffering from a serious ailment and believed that he would not be able to resume his full responsibilities for many months, if ever. He said that Spain was closely following events through its Embassy in Havana and planned to be "as discreet as possible" for the moment. Sandomingo said that the Spanish Embassy in Havana had communicated with leading dissidents to encourage calm (but not inactivity) and to offer Spain's protection if conditions warranted.

13. (C) The Ambassador suggested that, in the event of a transfer of power in Havana, Spain and the USG should commit to consult one another before making a decision to recognize or endorse a successor government. Sandomingo agreed in principle and said he would convey this suggestion to Deputy FM Bernardino Leon. But he also said Spain did not believe that significant change would be possible in Cuba as long as people believed that Fidel Castro might return to power. He said, however, that once it becomes clear that he will not be back, there will be opportunities to promote reform and steer developments in a positive direction. The Ambassador expressed concern that if events in Cuba were allowed to simply follow their own course, they could easily head in a negative direction such as the consolidation of a Raul-led dictatorship, and perhaps even lead to chaos and bloodshed. Sandomingo recounted his own experience in Cuba and, while acknowledging the possibility of violence, said that he did

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not believe Fidel's cohorts would be able to resist popular pressure for change, making a succession virtually impossible to carry out.

14. (C) Sandomingo said that Spain looked to its own transition from Francoism as a possible model for Cuba, while pointing out that the absence in Cuba of a stabilizing figure such as King Juan Carlos detracted from the viability of such a model. The Ambassador pointed out that the applicability of the Spanish model was further undermined by the fact that, unlike Spain in the 1970s, Cuba's economy was in shambles and the Cuban people had little information about the outside world (REF C).

//FM MORATINOS: SPAIN NOT BACKING A PARTICULAR SUCCESSOR//

15. (C) In the course of a broad-ranging July 27 conversation with FM Moratinos, the Ambassador inquired about a press report citing MFA sources who indicated that Spain sought increased engagement with Raul Castro and Cuban FM Felipe Perez Roque as the most likely successors to Fidel Castro (REF B). Moratinos said that Spain expected Cuba's transition to resemble Spain's transition to democracy (i.e. - to include current regime figures) but denied that Spain had determined that either Raul Castro or Perez Roque represented such a transitional figure. The Ambassador said to Moratinos that it would be vitally important for the USG and Spain to resolve any differences in our approaches on this issue beforehand to prevent Castro regime hardliners from exploiting our differences for their own ends. He repeated this point in his August 2 meeting with Sandomingo.

//SPANISH POLITICAL COMMENTARY ON CASTRO ILLNESS//

16. (U) Castro's temporary transfer of power has garnered significant attention from Spanish politicians and media. President Zapatero said that it was inappropriate to make political statements while Castro was ill and FM Moratinos wished Castro a quick recovery. Vice President Maria Teresa Fernandez de la Vega, on travel in Bogota, expressed hope for Castro's recovery and said that the Cuban people should be

the ones to decide Cuba's future. Socialist Party spokesperson Diego Lopez Garrido called for a transition to a democracy "which currently does not exist in Cuba," while warning against outside interference by the Cuban exile community. The far left "Izquierda Unida" predictably lauded Castro's "socialist triumphs," as did ETA front-group Batasuna. The center-right Popular Party spokesperson said that Castro "should have transferred power to the Cuban people, since hereditary dictatorships are not permissible."

//COMMENT//

17. (C) As we move forward with Spain, it will be useful to reinforce with Spanish interlocutors the USG's strong belief that decisions on the scope and pace of change in Cuba rest with the Cuban people and that the USG has not appropriated that role for itself. As we have indicated to our contacts at all levels, our goal is not to direct a Cuban transition, but to help keep a transition from being stifled by Castro regime elements. Our sense is that Spanish officials are not certain how to balance their desire for stability with their desire for a move towards democracy, but are more comfortable than we are with the concept of an extended transition that will include members of the current ruling class. We should be as specific as possible regarding our own views on this issue, if only to avoid any confusion on the part of our allies concerning our redlines.

AGUIRRE